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Reds Holding A. F. Pilot

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Red China is holding a captured U. S. pilot.

He is Air Force Captain Philip Smith, Victorville, Calif., who was captured in September 1965. Although not definitely known, it is believed his F-104 was shot down over the Gulf of Tonkin by a MIG piloted by a Chinese.

While the State Department ascertained about a year ago that Smith was being held prisoner in Peking, tight-lipped silence was maintained until the information leaked out through a background memorandum that the American Red Cross circulated among its officials.

This intra-office paper, dealing with U.S. prisoners in Communist hands, discussed Smith's case as follows:

"Another point to keep in mind in answering inquiries on the subject of Americans held prisoners is the fact that with the cooperation of the Chinese Red Cross, we continue to aid the five Americans detained in China to whom the American Red Cross and/or their families are sending packages every month.

"Among the five is Air Force Captain Philip E. Smith, who was shot down September 1965, and captured by the Chinese. The other four are Bishop James E. Walsh, Cumberland, Md.; John Downey, New Britain, Conn.; Richard Fecteau, of Lynn, Mass.; and Hugh Redmond, Yonkers, N.Y. (Downey and Fecteau are Army civilians captured during the Korean war,

and Bishop Walsh and Redmond were imprisoned while in China.)

"In addition to receiving packages every month, these detainees also are permitted to exchange letters with their families."

MANAGING THE NEWS — There is no explanation for the State Department's year-long silence regarding Captain Smith's capture by the Red Chinese.

His family was informed, but nothing was disclosed publicly.

Recently, when an important State Department official learned about the Red Cross memorandum, he immediately rushed a copy to Secretary Rusk. He in turn summoned top members of his Public Affairs Office.

This was the first they had heard about Smith and his fate. The information had been kept from them.

The press advisers strongly counseled that the State Department immediately publish the information that Smith was a captive of Red China. They pointed out that the Red Cross memorandum was certain to leak to newsmen and the department should lose no further time in making all the facts known.

One of these press officials reported that several newsmen had told him "rumors are circulating among Red Cross employees that a U.S. pilot is in Chinese hands." He related that he had told them this was news to him. But he stressed on Rusk that in view of the memorandum, the department was laying itself open to wide criticism if it persisted in trying to suppress word of Smith's capture.

Under this forthright urging Rusk directed that a "minimum amount" of information be released.

But the public affairs officers were ordered in doing so not to reveal anything concerning how the U.S. learned of Smith's capture, or that his wife is seeking permission to visit him in Peking.

HANOI SHUT-OUT — While the American Red Cross has been able to establish a limited degree of contacts with U.S. prisoners in Red China, neither it nor the International Red Cross has gotten anywhere in trying to do the same with North Viet Nam.

Several private meetings in Prague and Geneva with North Viet Nam and Viet Cong officials produced no results.

Hanoi has flatly refused to allow Red Cross authorities to either interview American prisoners or inspect their camps. Repeated Red Cross communications sent through diplomatic and private channels have gone unanswered.

Discussing these Communist rebuffs, the Red Cross memorandum states as follows:

"In spite of North Viet Nam's position that the Geneva conventions do not apply to American prisoners they are holding, the Red Cross is regularly transmitting to Hanoi the names of these men and mail from their next of kin. No acknowledgment of these communications has been received from North Viet Nam, but it is believed that some of the mail is being delivered to U.S. prisoners. However, we have no absolute assurance of this.

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